

Mr. Coburn

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"Living Lore in N.E." Series

Francis Donovan

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Mr. Coburn, substituting this week for the proprietor of the Center Market who has been taken to Waterbury hospital, stops in the Fire House today on his way to work. The patient, he tells us, is much better.

“He was pretty bad off, there for a while. They weren't letting him have visitors the other day, and they told his wife not to mention anything about the business.”

Mr. MacCurrie: Well, if he had a ruptured appendix he was goddam lucky to come through. I see one of them when I was doon there, and the fella passed oot.”

Mr. Coburn: “George is a pretty strong lad. No bad habits, always been healthy all his life. Well, I got to be getting back to the store. Busier'n hell this morning.” He leaves.

Mr. MacCurrie: “Well, George'll probably get better treatment than the lad I knew. They had him in the compensation ward, where I was. They didn't have room for him anywhere else. Those goddam nurses don't come near you, if they can get oot of it, when you're in the compensation ward. I see them give a fella a bath one mornin' give him the basin and the soap that is -- and pull the sheets doon, and by God the bed stayed that way till afternoon. They made it when they got goddam good and ready.

“That's one thing about this socialized medicine, if they ever get it through. They'll be givin' them a little better treatment in the hospitals than they are now. I mean, it won't make so much difference if you haven't got a lot of money.

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“Some of them are pretty dom hungry. I've seen them hand a bill to a patient before he'd been there a week. They want the money right doon on the line when a man leaves the hospital too.”

Mr. Ryan and Mr. Philips come in, exchange greetings.

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Mr. MacCurrie (addressing Mr. Philips) "I see congratulations are in order, Joe." (Mr. Philips at a meeting of the town committee this week has been indorsed for the post of deputy registrar of voters.)

Mr. Philips: "Thank you, Andrew, thank you."

Mr. Ryan: "Don't forget to congratulate him for the new arrival in his family, too."

Mr. Philips: "Thank you, too, Jim. I just called the hospital a little while ago. They're both doin' all right. Better luck than last time, thank God."

Mr. MacCurrie: "She have another Caesarian?"

Mr. Philips: "Oh yes, My wife can never have a normal delivery."

Mr. Ryan: "You had a good doctor for her, Joe. Curran is good on them cases."

Mr. Philips: "Yeah, we got all the confidence in the world in Curran."

Mr. MacCurrie: "I guess I'll be movin' along. Today is my day to go over to see George Anderson. He can't get oot of the house very much these days. Afraid of the slippery sidewalks. He kind of looks forward to me comin' over. He figures on it every Thursday. He gets so goddom lonesome over there with nobody to talk to except his daughter-in-law and the kids he says sometimes he thinks he'll go nuts."

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Mr. Philips: "I'll go along with you for a ways Andrew. It's pretty near time for me to go to work." Mr. MacCurrie shuffles into his overshoes, puts on his coat. They leave, Mr. Philips accomodating his pace to Mr. MacCurrie's somewhat slower gait.

Mr. Ryan: "Well, Joe is finally a father. He's pretty well set up about it too, and I don't know as I blame him. They lost two, you know.

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"A man likes to have at least one kid. I know it wouldn't be the same for me and the wife, if we didn't have ours. I suppose in the old days when a new one came along every year, you could get good and tired of it, but what the hell, if a man don't have one or two, what's he gettin' out of life?"

I make suitable reply, and Mr. Ryan nods his head vigorously and lights a cigarette.

"Of course when you get married, you let yourself in for plenty of trouble. I had an argument the other day with Joe the barber, he said a man was a goddamn fool to get married till he was thirty five or more. I said a man ought to have kids when he is young, so he'll still be young as they grow up.

"Joe said no man knows anything before he's thirty five so he's a damn fool to get married any younger. I said it all depended on the guy. The way I look at it, some fellas are ready to settle down earlier than others. Take me, I got married when I was twenty-two. My kid is thirteen now; and damn near as tall as I am. And I'm still young enough to understand him.

"Joe said a young fella has got to go out. Said he isn't satisfied to stay home nights and hand every bit of his pay in for the groceries. Joe said a young fella wants a car and good clothes 4 and wants to go out with the boys once in a while and when he finds out he can't do these things there's trouble. I ast him if he regretted gettin' married. He said yes, he was sorry he did. He said he was satisfied with his wife and kid and all that, but he thought he got married too young. Said if he had to do it over again and knew what he knows today, he wouldn't do it.

"Well, that's the way Joe looks at it. Me. I'm different. Not that I don't have my troubles, either. I hadda get a new rent last month. I been livin' down on River street for five years. Paid twelve dollars rent when I went in there.

"They raised it to fifteen two years ago that was all right. I didn't squawk, because they were nice rooms. Only thing, they were a little hard to heat. Then last summer they put in

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a new sink in the kitchen and they went up to seventeen. I didn't holler about that, either, even though the place needed paperin' and paintin'.

"Then last month, they come around and told me the rent was goin' to be twenty two. Can you imagine that? I said wait a minute, what am I goin' to get for my twenty two. I said are you goin' to fix the place up? They said, well, no, not right away, but they were goin' to go to work on it in the spring.

"I offered to give them three months rent ahead if they'd do it right away, but no soap. So then I told them I wouldn't pay it. Lucky thing, I found a rent that afternoon. A damn sight nicer than the old one, too. Five rooms, hardwood floors, nice bathroom, hot water all the time. Up there over Falinsky's. I'm payin' twenty-five, but I figure it's worth it. I get a garage along with it and the place is nicer. I said to the wife I don't give a damn if I 5 have to pay thirty, I said, we're gettin' out of here. What's the use of lettin' them put anything over on you. Right?"

Right, I agree, Mr. Ryan consults his wrist watch.

"You comin' up town, by any chance?" There is no one else in the Fire House and the hands of the old town hall clock are approaching five. I agree with Mr. Ryan that I "might as well go 'up town."